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ABSTRACT

An experiment was conducted to clarify the relations between affect and altruism by inducing affect directly. It was hypothesized that children who experienced positive affect would share more than controls, while those experiencing negative affect would share significantly less than controls. Ss were 25 girls and 18 boys from the second and third grades. Ss were brought individually to a trailer by the Experimenter and were told that they were to receive 25 pennies for helping test some new hearing equipment. The child had the option of donating his money to a less fortunate child. Results indicate that brief affective experiences have significant implications for behavior toward others. People who are experiencing positive affect tend to be kind to themselves and others. Results for negative affect are inconclusive. Further research is recommended. (CK)

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EFFECT OF MOOD ON CHILDREN'S GIVING

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This experiment attempted to clarify the relations between affect and altruism by inducing affect directly. In accord with previous speculation in this area, it was hypothesized that children who experienced positive affect would share more than controls, while those experiencing negative affect would share significantly less than controls.

METHOD

Subjects, Experimenters, and Locale

Twenty-five girls and 18 boys from the second and third grades of a suburban elementary school were randomly assigned to two treatment and two control groups. Within these groups, *S*s were roughly equated for sex and grade. All *S*s were seen by two experienced male *E*s, each of whom ran approximate equal numbers of *S*s in each group.

The experiment was conducted in a comfortably appointed research trailer located on the school grounds. The trailer has two rooms, the larger of which contains the experimental apparatus. Observation and recording was conducted by a second *E* in the smaller control room. In the experimental room, *E* and *S* faced each other across a small table, next to which lay a stereo tape recorder and headphones. Across the room was a can with a slotted top. A large sign on the can read "Money for Other Children."

Procedure

The children were brought individually to the trailer by *E* and were told that they were to get 25 pennies for helping test some new hearing equipment. The *E* then suggested that, after he had left the room, the child could donate some money to the children who would not get to help, but that the child did not have to.

The *E* then placed the headphones on the child, telling him to indicate in which ear he heard a click. The hearing test took about 3½ min.

Positive and negative affect. Immediately after the hearing test, the children were asked to generate experiences that had made them either happy or sad, using a technique similar to that used by Mischel, Ebbesen, and Zeiss (in press) in another context. The *S* was then asked to think about one such experience for 30 sec.

Neutral affect. Two control groups were employed to implement a relatively neutral affect condition. The first served as control for verbalization. After the hearing test, *S*s were asked to count slowly for 30 sec. while *E* attended. The second was a no-treatment control which required *S*s to sit quietly for the 30-sec. period.

In all conditions, *E* then left for 90 sec. after reminding *S* that he could share his money if he wanted to, but that he did not have to.

RESULTS

The amount of money contributed by each child during the experimenter's 90-sec. absence was the dependent measure. A preliminary test comparing the two control groups indicated no significant difference ($t = .52$, $df = 13$) in amount contributed, and the data from these groups were combined for further analyses.

The means and standard deviations of the amounts contributed by children in each condition were as follows: negative affect: $N = 14$, $M = 1.14$, $SD = 1.75$; control: $N = 15$, $M = 2.80$, $SD = 4.44$; positive affect: $N = 14$, $M = 5.00$, $SD = 3.30$. A one-way analysis of variance revealed a significant difference among the group means ($F = 4.68$, $df = 2/40$, $p < .025$). Virtually all of the variability was accounted for by a significant linear trend ($F = 9.30$, $df = 1/40$, $p < .005$), which indicated that contributions to others increased linearly from negative to neutral (control) to positive affective state.

Because the data were skewed and because there was some variation among the individual group variances, a nonparametric analysis was also performed. A Kruskal-Wallis test for overall differences among the groups was significant ($H = 6.80$, $df = 2$, $p < .05$). Median tests were used to determine if the two experimental conditions differed from the control, and the obtained probability levels were halved to allow for the directionality of the hypotheses. The results indicated that the median for positive affect was above that for control condition ($\chi^2 = 4.13$, $df = 1$, $p < .025$) while the median for negative affect was below the control median ($\chi^2 = 8.97$, $df = 1$, $p < .005$).

DISCUSSION

The results of this experiment demonstrate that brief, even fleeting, affective experiences appear to have significant implications for behavior toward others. The transient experience of positive affect makes children more generous to others, while the equally ephemeral experience of negative affect appears to make them more niggardly.

With regard to negative affect, the results presented here are at variance with those offered by other investigators. Using the success-failure paradigm for inducing affect, neither Berkowitz and Connor (1966) nor Isen (1970) were able to demonstrate differences between *S*s who failed and controls. Nor were Mischel, Coates, and Raskoff (1968) able to distinguish failure from controls in the context of noncontingent self-reward.

Considering the weight of contrary evidence, it may be wise to approach the present data tentatively. Yet, it is intuitively compelling that if positive affect has its consequences, so too should negative affect. Moreover, using the lost-wallet technique, Hornstein (1970) has demonstrated that the *vicarious* induction of negative affect retards the number of wallets returned by finders.

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Hornstein's observations would appear to support the data presented here.

Two possibilities arise for reconciling these discrepancies. The first suggests that within the failure paradigm, considerations that are extraneous to negative affect have served to counteract such findings as might have resulted. As suggested elsewhere (Isen, Horn, & Rosenhan, 1971; Rosenhan, in press), the experience of failure not only induces negative affect but also a desire to repair one's image in the experiment. Such a desire might countervail the ordinary tendency toward niggardliness after failure and make the *S*'s behavior appear like that of a control *S*.

A second explanation, not inconsistent with the first, holds that negative affect, particularly in the form of failures in games, may be easier to counteract or annul than the aversive properties of negative affect which is internally generated, though why this might be the case is by no means yet clear.

The results for positive affect presented here are consistent with those obtained by other investigators in a variety of contexts. Berkowitz (in press) reports that adults who had been previously complimented in an interview were more willing to give a college student money for a bus fare. Similar findings with regard to other kinds of helpfulness and charitability have been reported by Berkowitz and Connor (1966), Isen (1970), Isen et al. (1971), Isen and Levin (1972), and Hornstein (1970).

These data on the implications of positive affect for noncontingent generosity to others parallel similar findings on the effects of positive affect for generosity to self. Mischel, Coates, and Raskoff (1968) induced success experience in children by manipulating their scores on a bowling game. Subsequently, these children rewarded themselves noncontingently with tokens much more than did children who had failed or been in the control group. Similar findings with regard to contingent self-reward have been obtained by Kanfer and Marston (1963). Nor are the findings limited to self-reward. Mischel, Ebbesen, and Zeiss (1971) found that adults who had been given favorable personality assessments and who were therefore presumed to be experiencing positive affect tended to seek out further information about their assets, while those who had been given negative or control personality information tended to focus on their liabilities.

Thus, a general picture emerges from this group of experiments on self- and other-reward: People who are experiencing positive affect tend to be kind to themselves and to others in a variety of ways. They tend to reward themselves and others, to attend to their own assets more than their liabilities, and even to be perceptually sensitive to words that are consistent with their affective state (Postman & Brown, 1952). In this regard it would be particularly useful to examine the effect of positive and negative feelings on self- and other-gratification in the context of a single study. Such a strategy would allow the determination of whether individual *S*s show similar effects for both dependent measures.

Of special interest in this study is the affect induction itself, which seems closer to "pure" affect induction than techniques that have been used in the past. The present technique may prove useful for investigations of the parameters of affective states, and for studies of cognitive and other strategies for altering and maintaining feeling states. It is encouraging to note that while this particular affect induction has only been used with children, a somewhat similar procedure has been successfully used with adults by Gouaux and Gouaux (1971).

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